

Cascade Heights Public Charter School



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Milwaukie, OR 97222

7969 SE Thompson Road
Milwaukie, OR 97222

March 14, 2011

House Revenue Committee
Legislative Revenue Office
Room 143
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Committee Members;

As a parent of two charter school students, one in fourth grade and one in ninth grade, I urge you to support HB 3397.

I live in district 40. My youngest child attends Cascade Heights Public Charter School. Her older sister graduated from Cascade Heights as a National Honors Society student and now attends Clackamas Middle College.

Both of these schools are providing an excellent education for my children. When we were trying to decide on a high school, my daughter was an advanced student. That is one of the wonderful benefits of the program at Cascade Heights: students are allowed to advance because of leveled and differentiated instruction. We discovered that much of the material common for high school freshman courses in English Language Arts had already been covered at Cascade Heights. She had also completed Algebra 1.

Some schools we inquired at were unable to accommodate her needs and would have required her to repeat material she had already successfully mastered. However, Clackamas Middle College had no problem placing her in the appropriately leveled courses. CMC has been a good choice and my high school student is well on her way to graduating early with a near perfect GPA.

As a staff member of Cascade Heights, I also see the other side of the coin: children who come to the school with challenges or behind grade level in areas receiving the differentiated instruction, structure and cohesive curriculum they need to flourish and succeed. The staff at our school is dedicated and amazing. Our parent body goes above and beyond to support the school. Volunteers log thousands of hours every year, filling key roles that we are unable to fund.

Cascade Heights and Clackamas Middle College are two of the 12 schools in the North Clackamas school district rated "outstanding" on the Oregon AYP reports and Cascade Heights was also voted "Oregon Charter School of the Year" in 2009 by the Northwest Center for Educational Options. Clearly they are doing a good job.

Pub Hearing on
3-16-11

MEASURE: HB 3397
EXHIBIT: A-A
HOUSE REVENUE COMMITTEE
DATE: 3/16/2011 PAGES: 2
SUBMITTED BY: DEBRA DIETCH

Unfortunately, the current funding situation does not do them justice. According to a funding survey done by the Northwest Center for Educational Options, (which can be found at: http://www.nwceo.org/pdf/NWCEO_Charter_School_Funding_Study_May_2010.pdf; an extract is enclosed) the average Oregon public charter school student receives only about HALF of the public funds children in other public schools receive. Nor are we provided a facility. This is simply not fair to our children. Why should my students, because they are in a public charter school be treated as if they are less valuable? They are not! We believe in the public school system and we participate in it. Our children should not be treated like second class citizens. Here are a few examples of how this translates for our family: we pay out of pocket for many of Mikhaela's credits; Fiona and her schoolmates eat lunch and have daily P.E. outdoors, no matter what the weather (if it is too inclement to be outside, we rent space for P.E. or have it in the classrooms); and school events such as sock-hops, Spring programs, etc. must all be held off campus at rented facilities.

Our district often gives the impression they feel like we are "taking money" from them. My question is "Whose money is it?" The money for public education belongs to the children, of course. If they move to a different public school, then the money should follow them, where ever they go. And it should be used to provide the benefits they need.

For all these reasons and more, I urge you to support HB 3397. Charter schools need your support. With stabilized and full funding, charter schools will be able to pay their teaching staff salaries commensurate with their peers in traditional schools, maintain facilities, provide opportunities to all children who come to their doors and increase the quality of education for their students. As a rising tide lifts all boats, successful charter schools' innovations and successes are disseminated throughout the state via dissemination grants and professional learning opportunities. What we do well benefits all Oregon students, not just the ones in charter schools. We are part of the vanguard improving education for all Oregon's youth, which is the whole point of charter schools in the first place.

If you have never visited either Cascade Heights or Clackamas Middle College, I invite you to do so. They will welcome your visit and seeing these schools in person and meeting with either Holly Denman (Cascade Heights) or Brian Sien (CMC) as well as their staff and students will convey so much more than I can do in this letter.

Please vote for HB 3397.

Sincerely,



Mrs. Debra Dietch
7969 SE Thompson Rd.
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Enclosure (1)